Three Forest Nenets Myths

recorded by Toivo V. Lehtisalo in 1914

Adapted from:

Toivo V. Lehtisalo: Entwurf einer Mythologie der Jurak-Samojeden. Helsinki: Société finno-ougrienne, 1924 (Soumalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia / Mémoires de la Société Finno-ougrienne, 53).

Translated from German to English

by Eric Paul Bredvik (revised by Katja Mellmann),

for **The Forager Folklore Database (FFDB)**,

a compilation of traditional narratives from non-agricultural societies, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, project no. 463393271, 2022-2025, conducted by Katja Mellmann in collaboration with Michelle Scalise Sugiyama). The **FFDB Documents** series provides English translations of selected narratives originally published in a different language.

Suggested Citation:

Toivo V. Lehtisalo: Three Forest Nenets myths. Trans. for the Forager Folklore Database. FFDB Documents. 2025. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo/14920131.

CC BY

Content

Cosmogonic tales and heavenly spirits *3*
The Creation of Land (Earth Diver) 3
How the Old Woman of the East Killed Her Own Son 5
Sacred places and their spirits *6*
The Two-faced Creature 6

CC BY

 10.5281/zenodo/14920131

Cosmogonic tales and heavenly spirits

The Creation of Land (Earth Diver)

Adapted from:	p. 8-9 in the primary source
Narrator:	unidentified
Localization:	Tobolsk Governorate
Time of recording:	1914

Erstwhile there was no land, but only water everywhere. In the heavens, *Num* [a heavenly spirit] was living, and many kinds of birds. *Num* sent swans and geese to see if there was land somewhere. They returned saying that they had not seen land anywhere. *Num* sent out the black-throated loon (Gavia arctica) and said, »You are skilled in diving, go check if there is land or anything else beneath the water.« The loon went out and dove straight down. On the sixth day it came back to the heavens and said, »There was something to be seen below, but my strength failed me. If there was someone with more strength than me, they surely could reach the place.« The *ljuuri* bird said, »If that is the case, then I will go.« It dove under and returned on the seventh day with some soil or a blade of grass in its beak and made a nest which drifted on the water, back and forth, depending on the wind. As *Ljuuri* did not return to report, *Num* decided to come down himself to investigate. There he drifted about with the wind on the water. *Num* spoke, »Let us prepare a larger earth, dive down once more!« *Ljuuri* went and stayed away for seven days on his journey,

CC BY

 10.5281/zenodo/14920131

and *Num* packed the land together. When the land had gotten big enough to build a dwelling on it, *Num* said, »Now we will observe the night's rest, now we can lay us down to rest.« An old man came to them from somewhere and said, »I have looked everywhere for a dwelling place for myself and have not found one anywhere. Take me in!« *Num* said, »We have prepared this land for ourselves. Go and search yourself, perhaps you will find land. We don't let you in.« But the old man begged and begged, and finally *Num* took him in for the night. When they arose at dawn, the old man was not inside. He was outside and was washing his face at the edge of the land, but actually he was not really washing his face, but was trying to break the land apart. Num said, »What are you doing there, you have already broken off half of the land!« He said, »I am washing myself.« *Num said,* »Go away!« The old man went away. They enlarged the land. *Num* bade the people to come, Samoyeds, Ostyaks, Russians, animals, trees, rivers, and so on. The old man from before came again and asked *Num* for land to live on. *Num* spoke, »We have made this land ourselves. Had you helped, then we would let you on it, we do not need you now.« The old man begged and begged, pushed his staff onto the land and said, »If you just give me the spot where my staff is, then I will not need anything else.« *Num* thought, »It is not a big space, there where the staff is,« and said, »Well, alright, you can live there!« The old man went into the hole and sneered, »I tricked you after all! I live here on my spot under the earth and will steal away the people.« *Num* spoke, »I

CC BY

 10.5281/zenodo/14920131

thought wrong. I thought he would live on the earth, but the monster went into the ground.«

How the Old Woman of the East Killed Her Own Son

Adapted from:	p. 27 in the primary source
Narrator:	unidentified
Localization:	Tobolsk Governorate
Time of recording:	1914

One morning, the son of the Old Woman of the East[1] said to his mother, »Mother, you seem to be in a good temper today, I will go out without clothes.« »Don't go,« said the mother, »my temper is short, but the day is long. I do not yet know what kind of mood I will be in. Put on some clothes!« »No,« said her son, »you look as if you are in good spirits today,« and went off without clothing. In the evening, after sundown, a frost settled, and the son froze to death. The mother was upset that her son had not taken any clothes with him.

[1] The »Old Woman of the East« is a spirit dwelling at the east end of the sky. She sends the dreadful east wind, which allegedly brings death.

10.5281/zenodo/14920131

Sacred places and their spirits

The Two-faced Creature

Adapted from: p. 57-58 in the primary source
Narrator: unidentified
Localization: Tobolsk Governorate
Time of recording: 1914

Once a Samoyed of the Lyamin river directed his boat toward a rise on the shore to fell buckthorn trees (Rhamnus frangula) there for a fish trap. After working he sat down by his boat and lit his pipe. Then he saw a three-eyed raven-like bird settle onto the rise and vanish. After some time he looked towards the mountain again where now stood a humanoid being; when it turned its back to the Samoyed, he saw that there was a face on the back of the head as well. It lay down on its belly and slid down the mountain to the middle of the river and then went back to the mountain without sinking into the water. On the second try it almost slid to the other side of the river. The Samoyed was frightened, trembled by his boat and prayed to *Num* that *Parnyy* would not do anything bad to him. When he returned home, he sacrificed a reindeer to *Num*. Since then, no one fells trees on that mountain.

CC BY

 10.5281/zenodo/14920131